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ABSTRACT

The standard treatment of object pronouns in Latin American Spanish assigns a direct-object function to "lo" and "la" and an indirect-object function to "le." This study challenges this descriptive attribution in light of the contradictory and refractory evidence in Spanish morphosyntax. It is suggested that more detailed research, especially sociolinguistic research relating to Latin American Spanish, might approach the analysis differently. The forms of "le" indeterminacy that seem not to conform to the standard treatment include: cases in which "le" appears as a sociolinguistically determined substitution for "lo," the form standard explanations would dictate; pattern conformity; and structures involving ambiguity or semantic overlapping in addition to these patterns. An alternative analysis viewing certain verbs as homonymic predicates, either communicative (of the "decir" class) or agentive (of the "hacer" class), is proposed and illustrated, and it is suggested that structural symmetry is a confounding pressure in these cases. It is also proposed that "le" functions as an unmarked third-person pronoun and grammatically acceptable compromise. (MSE)

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LE INDETERMINANCY IN SPANISH

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0. Standard treatments of object pronouns in Latin American Spanish assign a "direct-object" function to the morphs lo/la and an "indirect-object" function to le. This sort of descriptive attribution is based implicitly on two assumptions: 1) it is possible, from a semantic and/or pragmatic point of view, to distinguish between disjunctive categories that can be called direct or indirect complementation; and 2) there is clear inventory of verbs that a) take only direct object, b) take only indirect objects, or c) take both types of objects. Both assumptions enjoy a certain amount of validation from the structural evidence of Spanish, but both must also be questioned in the light of contradictory or refractory evidence that confirms how such assumptions are only explanatory approximations.

I wish to sketch the parameters of such a questioning by adducing several significant examples of contradictory or refractory structures. It is my contention that this area of Spanish morphosyntax exemplifies George Lakoff's hypothesis concerning squishy syntactic categories: those areas of syntax that cannot be subjected to a categorical analysis either because they are inherently vague or because any one principle of explanation is

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left with a residue of data that it cannot accomodate. Such a postulate can be taken to confirm the antitransformational position that surface syntax is too fluid and relative, because of the communicational and pragmatic contexts of language usage, to be neatly accounted for by the abstract categories of deep structure, whether the latter is conceived of in syntactic or semantic terms. My own view is that squishy phenomena do not invalidate a deep structure analysis. But they do provide significant test cases for the evaluation of the premises on which the categories of such an analysis are constructed. Even more important is the need to continue the review of the standard explanations of such phenomena, which are often the most "humble" and seemingly trivial aspects of grammar. It is not my goal to "prove" one or another analysis, but simply to suggest some of the ways in which more detailed research--particularly the sort of sociolinguistic research so sorely lacking for Latin American Spanish--might approach the subject. Throughout this discussion, I will be using the term **le intederminancy** as cover all of the phenomena at issue.

1. The most general form of le indeterminancy and probably the one that accounts for the greatest number of cases where le appears where standard explanations would dictate lo is as a sociolinguistically determined substitution. In cases like

(1) Le vi ayer.

(2) Le honraron por sus apreciadas contribuciones.

the "sense" of the verb so clearly requires a direct-object

complement that is difficult to mistake le as anything other than a substitution for lo. This interpretation is reinforced if we look at feminine variations on these utterances:

(3) La vi ayer (a María)

(4) *Le vi ayer (a María)

(5) La honraron (a la Sra. del Presidente) por sus apreciadas contribuciones.

(6) *Le honraron (a la Sra. del Presidente) por sus apreciadas contribuciones.

or if we consider that passivization is possible (I will give it only for the second utterance, since pragmatic concerns would probably block it for the first example):

(7) El fue honrado por sus apreciadas contribuciones.

(8) La Sra. del Presidente fue honrada por sus apreciadas contribuciones.

Treatments of Spanish are generally quite certain that passivization is possible only for direct object complements (and for a subcategory of verbs taking such complements under specific pragmatic circumstances). Although we will see latter that there is some difficulty with this premise, I have no problem in subscribing to it at this point as support for the assertion that the object pronoun involved in these examples is "direct" in meaning. I stated that this sort of substitution may be accounted for in sociolinguistic terms. That is, le appears as a substitution for lo for those speakers who may wish to emulate a Peninsular stand-

ard for purposes of a perceived greater elegance or formality; it is for this reason that le does not substitute for la, since le only appears in the academic Peninsular norm as a masculine object pronoun. I can offer no research evidence on the parameters of this phenomenon, which requires extensive research, except to say that one would expect to find it used by those speakers who subscribe to the priority of the Peninsular norm over their native Latin American national norm, and in those circumstances in which certain formal and social formulas are used (le saludo is almost universal, even among those speakers who are not wont to indulge in le substitution).

2. A second form of le substitution involves pattern conformity: a series of verbs in parallel constructions that involve a mixture of direct and indirect object pronouns may impose a pattern conformity in favor of le, since le may substitute for lo, but not viceversa, thereby giving the pronouns an epiphonemic force:

(9) Cuando llegué a la casa de Juan, lo vi, lo saludé y le espeté que eso no podía continuar así.

(10) Cuando llegué a la casa de Juan, le vi, le saludé y le espeté que eso no podía continuar así.

3. Where these the two aformentioned phenomena are susceptible to satistical verification and do not seriously challenge standard descriptions of le vs. lo, structures involving ambiguity or semantic overlapping are much more problematical. For

example, are verbs like saludar, invitar, obligar, ordenar members of the class that requires an indirect object or of the class that requires a direct object? Leaving aside the possibility that occurrences of le saludo exemplify le substitution for reasons of presumed elegance, there is a fundamental interdermi-nancy about these verbs as regards whether or not they have a communicative meaning (i.e., belong to a hierarchy of DECIR predicates) or an agentive meaning (i.e., belong to a hierarchy of HACER predicates). If DECIR predicates are the core of those verbs that take an indirect object (which embodies the goal argument of the predicate, the entity to which the communication is directed), HACER predicates are equally the core of those that take a direct object, the object of the action of the predicate. (Of course, DECIR may take an direct object, with or without an indirect object; but my point is that DECIR is paradigmatically an "indirect-object verb" or, to use another terminology, it is typically a three-place predicate.) DECIR and HACER predicates probably cannot be assigned to disjunctive categories. Rather, the former are a subclass of the latter.

The analysis that I propose involves the possibility of viewing certain verbs as homonymic predicates. One of these predicates is communicative in nature (i.e., of the DECIR class), and one is agentive in nature (i.e., of the HACER class). The apparently fluctuating use of the object pronouns may, therefore, have two explanations in this regard: either 1) the le vs. lo distribution corresponds to the presence of the communicative vs. the agentive predicate, or 2) there is a certain amount of indeterminancy in the choice of forms due to the fact that the

homonymic nature of the predicates encourages performative confusion or error. In actuality, of course, both explanations may be involved, or at least we may hypothesize as much in the absence of more adequate information.

Thus, (11) is communicative, while (12) is agentive:

(11) Le invité a que se quedara. = Le formulé la invitación de que se quedara.

(12) Lo invité a la fiesta. = Fue invitado por mí a la fiesta/a que viniese a la fiesta.

Because (12) is agentive in nature, it may be passivized; conversely, the passivizable nature of (12) will predict the occurrence of the lo pronoun. There are a number of verbs that show a split distribution like invitar; some of them are completely homonymic, while others are close homonyms, so close that in use, like the common performance confusion between deber + inf. and deber de + inf., they may become homonyms:

(13) Le ordené callar. = Le expresé la orden de que se callara.

(14) Lo ordené. = Le impuse orden.

[cf. (15) Lo ordené callar. = Ordené a ? que lo callaran/lo hicieran callar.]

(16) Le saludo muy cordialmente. = Le comunico mis más cordiales saludos.

(17) Al verlo lo saludaron sus amigos. = Fue saludado por sus amigos al verlo/al ser visto por ellos.

(18) Le mandé pagar la cuota. = Le comuniqué la orden

de pagar la cuota.

(19) Lo mandé (a) pagar la cuota. = Lo envié ? con la orden de pagar la cuota.

The lo/le disjunction between homonymic or nearly homonymic verbs--and the potential performance confusion resulting therefrom--extends also to the split between agentives that are homonymic with other semantic classes, or where both verbs are agentive but the basic semic meaning is different:

(20) Los traidores van a servirlo a sus enemigos en una bandeja de plata. = Lo van a ofrecer como sacrificio.

(21) Le serví más café.

(22) Sus ministros lo/le sirvieron con distinción durante muchos años. = Le prestaron servicios.

(23) Le ayudaron a cumplir con las tareas. = Le dieron ayuda para que cumpliera con las tareas.

(24) Lo ayudaron muy cortésmente.

(25) ?Le molesta si fumo? = ?Será una molestia/?Le será molestoso si fumo?

(26) Lo molestó un amigo de la familia. = Fue molestado/Fue víctima de molestia (criminal) por un amigo de la familia.

Assuming that all of the foregoing sentences are completely grammatical, although it is clear that a significant number of native speakers of Latin American Spanish will reject the lo examples with enough vehemance to indicate that the structural

patterns are to some degree marginal (just as a wide range of vocabulary items that one must, nevertheless, in lexicographic honesty register would also be rejected with equal vehemence), it is not clear to me exactly how to account for them. For example, (25) and (26) seem to clearly involve separate predicates, the former synonymous with fastidiar, the latter overlapping with items expressing various forms of sexual assault (undoubtedly, this usage corresponds to recent concerns over various forms of sexual harrassment and may even be an import from English).

The patterns for servir and ayudar, I would suggest, are a combination of possibily different predicates (or perhaps hierarchically different ones) and of social formulas whereby a direct object le corresponds to a sense of prestige and elevated or formal style. Note the following pair of polite formulas:

(27) Para servirle, señor.

(but not *(28) Para servirlo, señor.)

(29) Sea Ud. servido, señor.

The passive possibility (29) would seem to confirm the fact that the object of servir in the social formula is a "direct" object, since only direct objects may be passivized. Yet the formula demands the (fossilized) use of le.

A related issue involves the distinction between the "literal" and "metaphoric" meaning of verbs. I enclosed the terms of this standard disjunction in quotation marks because of the difficulty, in view of contemporary research on metaphor, to distinguish very clearly between what constitutes literal and what constitutes metaphoric meaning. However, consider the fol-

lowing utterances:

(30) Lo muerde un perro.

(31) Es mordido por un perro.

(32) Lo (re)muerde la conciencia.

*(33) Es (re)mordido por la conciencia.

One reason (30) easily admits passivization can be said to be because it involves a literal use of the verb morder, a "real" instance of its agentive meaning with an animate subject pragmatically capable of carrying out the action involve. On the other hand, the reason we sense (32) to be "metaphorical" is both because of the inanimate and abstract nature of the noun that would have to be taken as the agent of the verb, but also because the action our cultural code attributes to whatever our conscience does to us is not "literally real." On the other hand, (33) may have a certain poetic usefulness, but only in a context that prepares us to accept it as a legitimate trope.

A different situation is presented by the verb encantar. It would seem that two predicates are involved and that they are distinguished on the basis of le vs lo:

(34) La bruja los encantó a Hansel y Gretel.

(35) Le encantan los vinos chilenos.

Encantar in (34) has the meaning of hechizar, while in (35) it is simply a more "affective" synonym of gustar. Only encantar in the sense of (34) may be passivized:

(36) Hansel y Gretel fueron encantados por la bruja.

4. Clearly related to the appearance of the indeterminate le as the result of performance confusion in the face of homonynic or nearly homonymic predicates is the pressure of structural symmetry. Causative and permissive constructions involve a main verb followed by a dependent clause, either as a subjunctive verb or as an infinitive. In either case, the subject of the dependent verb appears, virtually obligatorily on the surface, as an object pronoun of the main verb:

(37) Le permitieron venir. = Le concedieron el permiso de que viniera.

(38) Le dejaron hacer las cosas a su antojo. = Le dieron el permiso para que hiciera las cosas a su antojo.

= (39) Lo dejaron hacer las cosas a su antojo.

(40) Le hicieron/obligaron venir. = Causaron que viniera.

= (41) Lo hicieron/obligaron venir.

Again, although these structures occur, there are native speakers who will vehemently reject the versions with lo. It seems impossible to justify any of these main verbs as communicative in nature (i.e., as belonging to the DECIR class of predicates), yet le is recognized as the "standard" academic pronoun required. Moreover, it is the only one that may occur with permitir as far as I have been able to determine, although permitir and dejar are equally permissive. Hacer is more strictly

causative (although hacer as a two-place predicate is probably not semanticly equivalent to the incorporated causative meaning in single-clause surface utterances; this is the famous disjunction between:

(42) Lo/le hice morir.

and (43) Hice que muriera.

Obligar is jussive in nature. It may be possible to demonstrate that the structural variation is due to nonparallel behavior imposed by the differences between causative, permissive, jussive, etc. and their respective structural patterns. But I propose that a hypothesis to be pursued concerns the appearance of the interderminate le as a consequence of the possibility of construing the pronoun accompanying the main verb as representing an abstract argument requiring either a surface direct object or a surface indirect object embodiment (of course, the ambivalence may well be attributible to the fact that the pronoun in fact is the embodiment of the dominant argument of the underlying predicate of the dependent verb and does not correspond to any argument attached to the main verb). The assertion that "standard" usage always dictactes an indirect pronoun in these structures is of little consequence in the face of examples employing a direct object. One final note: should the direct object appear with these main verbs, it is significant to note that passivization can occur:

(44) Lo obligaron a Juan a estudiar. =

(45) Juan fue obligado a estudiar.

Finally, consider the possibility of structural confusion over the following type of pair. The meaning of both utterances is semantically and pragmatically synonymous, at least enough so that they can be taken to be "identical" in meaning. The fact that the first one may only grammatically take an indirect-object pronoun, while the second may take either is, I hypothesize, an example of le indeterminancy to the extent that the semantic equivalency imposes a structural parallelism, leading to the use of le where one would expect to find lo:

(46) Le palmeé la espalda.

(47) Le/lo palmeé en la espalda.

Others examples are:

(48) Le obsequié un libro.

(49) Le/lo obsequié con un libro.

(50) Le invité un café.

(51) Le/lo invité con un café

Of course, invitar here also shows the problem of the overlapping of DECIR vs. HACER meanings, which explains the following ambivalency:

(52) Le invité a tomar un café = Le comuniqué la invitación...

(53) Lo invité a tomar un café = Lo hice receptor de mi invitación...

5. An aside concerning a related structural issue involves

the following pair, which we may agree to be propositionally synonymous:

(54) Juan le pegó.

(55) Juan lo golpeó.

If these two utterances, and both involve two-place predicates, are propositonally synonymous, it is difficult to explain why one predicate requires an indirect object and the other a direct one. Of course, it may be possible to view pegar as exclusively a three-place predicate, in which case (54) is the result of the deletion of an understood or underspecified direct object:

(56) Juan le pegó una bofetada, una cachetada, un golpe, un porrazo, etc.

The principal objection to this line of reasoning is that pegar is more likely to occur without a direct object and that, as a transitive verb, too wide a range of potential direct object may be understood. In the case of other similar predicates, the deletion of an "understood" direct object pronoun will customarily result in the promotion of the indirect object to direct object status:

(57) Juan le besó la cara.

(58) Juan lo besó.

(cf. (59) Juan lo besó en la cara.)

In any case, it is obvious that pegar remains clearly marked for an indirect object pronoun, falling outside the structural

circumstances that have been described as favoring the use of the unmarked direct object pronoun.

6. Although I have attempted no more than to indicate what, in my opinion, should be the parameters of an adequate investigation of le indeterminancy based on patterns of internal structural conflict--squishiness--in the Spanish language, it is possible to propose an operating hypothesis for the use of le in the language. Le, in addition to the possiblity that it is statistically more frequent than lo in utterances because it is the surface manifestation of a greater number of underlying semantic/syntactic categories (i.e., covers a greater number of case frames in Fillmore's type of formulation), may also be viewed as the unmarked third-person pronoun. Thus, it appears whenever there is no structural reason to prefer lo or la, or where the speaker is, in the act of performance, unsure of whether a direct or an indirect object pronoun is called for, le becomes the compromise choice, which is why, even in loísta dialects, it will be acceptable as grammatical even in structures usually described as calling for a direct object. The extent to which le may substitute for la as an direct object is a related secondary question (related in turn to the frequent uses--usually identified as substandard--of la as an indirect-object pronoun); the intersubstitutibility of la and le would appear precisely to be part of the question of le indeterminancy in the Spanish language.

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